

United States Senate

November 17, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Vice Chairman Shelby,

Given the severity of agricultural damage from natural disasters this year, we ask that the Committee prioritize disaster recovery and relief for impacted agricultural producers and rural communities in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 appropriations bill, consistent with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimate of funding needs across all of its emergency programs. Without this critical emergency assistance, many producers could lose their livelihoods and many rural communities that have been devastated by extreme weather events will struggle to rebuild.

As you know, during the past year, record-breaking wildfires, hurricanes, heat waves, and extended periods of drought have caused agricultural devastation across the United States. Catastrophic disasters like Hurricane Ian, wildfires in New Mexico, and floods in states such as Kentucky and Montana have devastated rural communities, destroyed agricultural areas, upended livestock operations, and diminished the quality of certain high-value crops. In the last year, a large proportion of the West and High Plains regions of the United States has experienced devastating drought, including critical agricultural areas in the Colorado River Basin, Rio Grande River Basin, and California's San Joaquin Valley, which is currently rated at the most severe level of drought by the U.S. Drought Monitor. Agricultural producers in these areas have been forced to fallow fields or remove permanent crops as a result of substantially reduced water allocations and supplies.

We therefore urge you to include supplemental funding for authorized USDA programs, including the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), and Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP), in the FY 2023 appropriations bill to meet the total level of need estimated by the USDA. These programs are critical to post-disaster

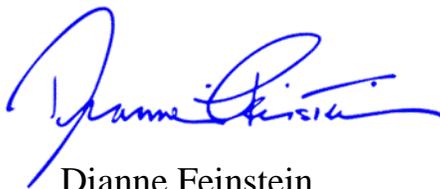
recovery and restoration efforts but currently lack the funding necessary to meet the level of need in impacted areas across the United States from this year's extreme weather disasters. EWP in particular has a growing waitlist of projects unable to start work on the ground without additional appropriations. Starting these recovery efforts quickly helps prevent further damage to life and property, and gives communities and land managers the resources and assistance they need to build resilience in the face of increasingly devastating natural disasters.

Since 2017, Congress has also appropriated emergency supplemental funding for agricultural disaster relief outside of permanent programs as a result of more frequent and severe natural disasters. This year should be no exception. The newly created Emergency Relief Program (ERP) and Emergency Livestock Relief Program (ELRP) fill an important gap in providing support for producers who have restricted planting or experienced crop loss, reduced yields, or quality loss due to natural disasters.

As USDA continues to administer ERP and ELRP for disasters in calendar years 2020 and 2021, we recognize that of the \$10 billion appropriated in FY 2022, approximately \$2 billion has not yet been expended. We understand that this is the result of a multi-phased approach to disbursement, and that all FY 2022 funding will be expended once Phase 2 is complete. We therefore urge you to also include emergency supplemental funding for crop and livestock losses in the FY 2023 appropriations bill that meets the level of need identified by USDA for disasters in calendar year 2022.

Agricultural producers are integral to our rural communities and the backbone of our domestic food system. We ask that you prioritize disaster recovery and relief funding assistance in the FY 2023 appropriations package, and we urge the Committee to provide robust funding that meets the USDA's estimate of funding needed for these programs. Thank you for your consideration of our request, and please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



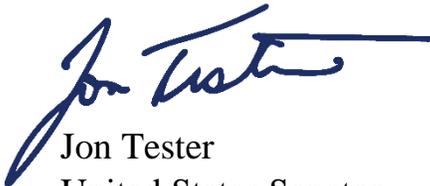
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator